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Chairman: Mr. Ball ..... (New Zealand)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 106: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/53/41, A/53/57, A/53/72–S/1998/156, A/53/95–S/1998/311, A/53/281, A/53/311, A/53/482)

1. **Ms. Sibal** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), referring to the recommendations for post-conflict peace-building contained in the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/53/482), said that at that session the General Assembly would be considering a draft declaration and programme of action to promote a culture of peace. In both texts the focus would be on post-conflict peace-building. UNESCO, which was coordinating activities for the International Year for the Culture of Peace, had set up a special unit for the provision of education to children in emergency situations.

2. UNESCO was committed to the promotion of the rights of the child, especially with respect to education. General Assembly resolution 52/107 of 12 December 1997 on the rights of the child voiced many UNESCO concerns; for example it stated that education should be directed towards the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the Charter of the United Nations and for different cultures and towards the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin. It also stressed the role of education in protecting children with special needs, the role of informal education, the question of children affected by armed conflict and the importance of education for the training of armed forces in the rights of the child.

3. In the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNESCO believed that the rights of the child in the field of education included the right to education, rights in education and rights through education. All children had the right to a good-quality basic education, to respect for their views and for fundamental freedoms at school, and to the benefits of education.

4. UNESCO was gathering information on the implementation of the Convention in the fields of education, culture and communication. It was also monitoring implementation of the Convention, educating the public on the Convention, encouraging education for all, promoting the education and status of girls and educating children in especially difficult circumstances. It had formulated guidelines to enable ministries of education and culture to raise awareness of the principles of the Convention which were relevant for education, culture and communication.

5. UNESCO had taken part in the Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States held in Durban in April 1998, and had perceived a significant shift in attitudes with regard to girl children, namely, that in Africa there had been a major push to get more girls into school and to recruit more female teachers. While education for all remained a long-term goal, education policies were now concentrating on priority areas such as rural children and the education of the girl child. A pragmatic and innovative approach had been adopted, which emphasized informal education. That approach had arisen from the desire of Africans to work out their own solutions and to break the cycle of dependence. UNESCO would help African countries in that undertaking.

6. **Mr. Al-Shamsi** (United Arab Emirates) said that while the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had led to increased attention being paid to the situation of the world's children, it was only the interests of certain sectors of the population in developed countries that were being promoted, while the situation of children in developing and poor countries was characterized by poverty, malnutrition, illness and illiteracy, as well as the violence of armed conflict, political unrest and ethnic tension.

7. The Convention had highlighted several ways to help poor families and to improve children's lives through health services, nutrition, education and development. However, many developing countries, particularly least developed and disaster-prone countries, lacked the infrastructure necessary to provide such services. The international community, and the multilateral financial institutions in particular, must therefore provide assistance to the Governments of those countries in order to enable them to help the underprivileged sectors of the population and guarantee the basic rights of childhood.

8. According to the statistics given in the reports of international humanitarian organizations, many children were the victims of sexual exploitation and violence, were obliged to engage in dangerous employment and to take part in armed conflict, all of which was in contravention of the Convention and of international law. It was therefore essential that States should demonstrate the political will to protect all such children, in addition to the disabled and the victims of landmines.

9. The United Arab Emirates had ratified the Convention in 1996 and had given priority, in its national programmes,

to the interests of the child as the linchpin of sustainable development. Mandatory primary education had been introduced, nurseries and health centres had been established and programmes for disabled and orphaned children had been implemented, all in keeping with the precepts of Islam and tradition. At the international level, assistance was provided to poor children, refugees and the victims of natural disasters. Collective efforts to eradicate disease were also supported, as was the work done by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to benefit the children of the world.

10. The United Arab Emirates denied the unfounded accusations contained in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/53/311) regarding the involvement of children in camel races; such races were a legal sporting activity known throughout the world and were a part of Arab culture. The United Arab Emirates condemned the employment of children in dangerous jobs, punished those who forced children to undertake such employment and was coordinating bilateral efforts to stamp out trafficking in children in the region.

11. **Mr. Maidin Hashim** (Brunei Darussalam) said that his country, which had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995, protected the interests of children and promoted their growth and development within a framework of tradition, culture and religion. In fulfilment of its obligations under the Convention, the Government was in the process of establishing a National Children's Council which would coordinate activities to promote children's rights, ensure that the principles of the Convention were taken into consideration when national policies were being formulated and prepare reports on the Convention's implementation. The Government was also considering a draft Children and Young Persons Order which provided for the protection of children in need, children without a family and child victims of abuse, neglect and exposure.

12. His Government allocated a substantial amount of its budget to social programmes. Long before acceding to the Convention, it had allocated a large part of the national budget to education and health programmes designed to give all children access to free schooling from the primary to the tertiary level, as well as to health care. It also provided housing to ensure a healthy environment for the country's population. Those services were reviewed constantly to keep them in line with the provisions of the Convention and, as a result of those efforts, the country had met most of the goals set in the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s.

13. The process of globalization had both a positive and a negative impact. The international community must assist the developing and least developed countries, which were finding it difficult to keep up with that process. Poverty, hunger, human rights abuses and social unrest affected all levels of society in those countries, particularly children. The international community also had an important role to play in assisting disabled children, whose numbers were increasing globally owing to war, child labour, violence and abuse, and in preventing the use of children as soldiers in time of war, which was a serious violation of the Convention. The international community should continue to support the work being done in that area by humanitarian agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. His delegation therefore welcomed the proposal to establish a working group on the protection of the rights of children with disabilities, as well as the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child that special attention should be devoted to the rights of the child in defining war crimes, age of criminal responsibility, aggravating and mitigating circumstances of crimes and protection of children's rights within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

14. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that, despite the progress made since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, much remained to be done to put into full effect the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children. The situation of children as described in the various reports on that subject demanded that States allocate increased resources to basic education; guarantee the protection of children in armed conflict, unaccompanied refugee minors and internally displaced children; prevent the enlistment of minors in armed forces; implement the Convention on Anti-personnel Landmines as soon as possible; draw up international norms to combat the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; and mobilize the financial and technical resources needed to achieve the goals of the World Summit for Children. His delegation hoped that the meeting of the UNICEF Executive Board to be held in January 1999 would pave the way for the implementation of an effective strategy for mobilizing and managing resources in the interests of children.

15. His delegation urged the Committee on the Rights of the Child to increase the number of its on-site visits; expand its dialogue with agencies of the United Nations system and government agencies with a view to implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and pursue its awareness-raising and information activities, with a view to

securing universal ratification of the Convention by the end of the century.

16. His country had ratified the Convention in 1990 and since 1991 had been implementing a national plan of action for children, in fulfilment of the recommendations of the International Conference of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on Assistance to African Children, held in Dakar in 1992. That plan was being accompanied by a campaign of child advocacy and of information on the goals of the Convention. The main objectives of the national action plan were to vaccinate 80 per cent of the child population with six antigens under the Expanded Programme on Immunization; eradicate neonatal tetanus; reduce measles mortality and morbidity rates by 95 per cent and 90 per cent respectively; eliminate vitamin A deficiency; carry out universal iodization of salt; combat diarrhoeal diseases by means of oral rehydration in 80 per cent of cases; promote breastfeeding in hospitals; eradicate Guinea-worm disease; raise the overall rate of school attendance from 58 per cent to 60 per cent, and that of girls to 42 per cent; give 61 per cent of the population access to drinking water and 46 per cent access to sanitation; and improve the living and educational conditions of 20,000 students in Koranic schools and of 60,000 children living in institutions. The Government would also launch a major community nutrition programme with the assistance of the World Bank and other agencies.

17. His delegation strongly supported the preparations for the special session to be held in 2001 and hoped that national evaluations would provide valuable input to the regional conferences to be held prior to that session. His Government had just ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, adopted in Addis Ababa on 11 July 1996, and remained ready to contribute to a global evaluation of the impact of the Convention and the World Summit for Children on the situation of children in Africa.

18. **Mr. Tessema** (Ethiopia) said that his Government had established committees at all levels to monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was taking various steps to raise awareness of the Convention's content throughout the country, for example by having the text translated into eight languages. It had also presented its first periodic report on implementation of the Convention to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

19. During the period 1995–1996, 47.5 per cent of the population had been under 14 years of age, which implied that a large portion of the population was not employed. In addition, only 45 per cent of the population had access to health services and the infant mortality rate was somewhere between 105 and 128 per thousand. Only 30.1 per cent of minors under 15 were in school; for sociocultural reasons the rate for girls (22.8 per cent) was lower than that for boys (37.1 per cent). Although minors under 14 were prohibited by law from working, minors often had to work from an early age, sometimes without pay. According to the 1994 census, 50.1 per cent of the 7 million children between 10 and 14 years of age were in the labour force. That situation was a result of poverty, lack of education and the long years of economic stagnation caused by the prolonged civil war, all of which had contributed to the phenomenon of street children, especially in large cities. Four years earlier there had been some 100,000 street children; by now their numbers had probably increased considerably. The Government was preparing and implementing, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations and international bodies, programmes for reintegrating children into society.

20. In order to find a sustainable solution to the problems facing children, the question of social underdevelopment must be dealt with. The Government had recently adopted various policies to improve the situation of society in general and that of children in particular. The 1993 health policy focused on the family, especially women and children. The Ministry of Public Health had prepared a long-term development plan for the health sector, with special emphasis on reproductive health, immunization, treatment of major infectious diseases and control of epidemic and sexually transmitted diseases. Free education had been introduced in order to raise the enrolment rate from 30.1 to 50 per cent by the year 2000; children would be educated in their mother tongue, as provided for in the Convention. The Ministry had also developed strategies with a view to increasing primary education enrolment rates and reducing the drop-out rate, especially for girls.

21. The unprovoked aggression by the Government of Eritrea in May 1998 had created a new humanitarian tragedy, for many children had perished in those attacks against civilians and others had been orphaned or internally displaced. That inhuman and irrational aggression against innocent children, a flagrant violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, must be strongly condemned. The international community must support Ethiopia's efforts to assist the victims of that tragedy. His Government would continue cooperating with the international community to improve the situation of children; it was grateful to UNICEF and non-governmental organizations for their interest in the children of Ethiopia.

22. **Mr. Donokusumo** (Indonesia) said that his delegation supported the activities of the Committee on the Rights of

the Child and was encouraged by the progress made by that Committee at its nineteenth session with regard to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child throughout the world, particularly the provisions relating to children in armed conflict. In June 1998, when the Security Council had taken up that question, his delegation had condemned the conscription of children, called for their immediate demobilization and urged Governments to prohibit the recruitment of minors during armed conflicts. He reaffirmed his delegation's support for the Presidential statement adopted by the Security Council and underlined the need for the Council to remain seized of that matter. He congratulated the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for his work and called on the international community to support him.

23. He expressed concern at continued delays in the process of drafting and adopting the optional protocol to the Convention, relating to the issue of children in armed conflict. A significant step forward had been the signing, during the past year, of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction; that Convention was especially important for children. He recalled that the Commission on Human Rights had urged all Governments to promote gender and age appropriate mine awareness programmes and child-centred rehabilitation. Children in many countries were threatened daily by more than 100 million landmines and other unexploded ordnance. He joined in supporting the activities of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and called on the international community to cooperate with her. Unfortunately, the current state of the world economy, in which millions of people were fighting to survive, contributed to the exploitation of children.

24. In order to promote the rights of the child and ensure children's survival, protection and development, the Department of Social Affairs of Indonesia had been designated as the national focal point and was working in close cooperation with various international funds and agencies. In 1998, two important initiatives had been undertaken: the declaration of the National Movement for Child Protection and the establishment of the National Child Protection Institute. The Department of Social Affairs had also tried to reduce poverty by providing financial assistance to private institutions, food assistance to primary school children and children of poor families, financial and technical assistance to groups of poor families and other social welfare recipients undertaking economic activities, and by providing assistance to the children of the unemployed. Activities at the national level had become more difficult, since millions of people had been forced below the poverty level, and school drop-out rates and malnutrition had increased. His delegation thanked UNICEF for its support in that emergency situation.

25. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that, despite the significant progress which had been made following the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the situation of children remained precarious in many countries of the world: 250 million children were forced to work and 120 million worked full time, sometimes in inhuman conditions; 145 million children aged between 6 and 11 were not attending school; over 200 million children under the age of five died every year from disease; and there were 20 million refugee or internally displaced children and 40 million street children.

26. The protection of children required the eradication of underdevelopment, which was the root of the problem. Rapid and determined action must be taken to establish legal frameworks and mechanisms for the prevention, by all possible means, of the exploitation of children. It was very important for the International Labour Organization to draw up a convention on the prohibition of the exploitation of child labour, at a time when children from the developing countries were paying a heavy price because of the ferocious competition in pursuit of a globalization which seemed to justify all excesses.

27. Another fundamental right was the right to education, which was the subject of the UNICEF report for 1999, and in which investment must continue to be made. If there was one question which required vigilance by the international community, however, it was that of the girl child, since girls were the victims of discrimination and maltreatment, often because of outdated prejudices. Girls must be protected because later, as wives and mothers, they would have responsibility for bringing up and educating future generations.

28. Since Algeria's independence, children had been at the centre of its economic, cultural and social policy, as was demonstrated by its ratification without reservations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993. Education was compulsory and free up to the age of 16 and free medical care was provided in schools, hospitals and clinics. Disabled children were accorded special protection. The exploitation of child labour was prohibited, and the minimum legal working age was 18. Discrimination against girls was also prohibited, and equality of opportunities was promoted. In less than three decades, the mortality rate of children under the age of five had been reduced through

vaccination programmes. Education costs constituted 40 per cent of the State budget; the enrolment rate of boys had reached 99 per cent, and that of girls, 89 per cent. A national plan for the implementation of the World Summit for Children and a children's guide had been drawn up in order to publicize the content of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national legislation on the subject.

29. Algeria had always condemned the participation of children in armed conflicts and had called for the adoption of firm and urgent measures to combat child prostitution and the use of children in pornography. The forthcoming conclusion of an optional protocol related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the commendable efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children demonstrated the concern of the international community about the suffering of so many of the children of the world.

30. **Mr. Seghairoon** (Sudan) said that, while a few countries enjoyed economic and technological prosperity, most of the world's population was mired in poverty and armed conflict, the main victims of which were children. For that reason, international cooperation was needed so as to protect the rights of the child, especially through the support of the developed countries and sensitization of the public.

31. The Sudan had been one of the first countries to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, since his Government attached great importance to children. The Sudan supported the opinion of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children that local values must be strengthened and developed. The Constitution of the Sudan established that the State must protect children and young people against all forms of exploitation and all types of spiritual and physical harm and protect them morally through the provision of civic and religious education which would enable them to grow up as a healthy generation. His Government had established a national council for child welfare, the Sudan's main institution for children, and had drawn up a national plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

32. In collaboration with UNICEF, his Government had carried out activities to promote the Convention through the local media and had held a seminar for a group of Sudanese journalists in order to publicize the Convention, which was being published in local dialects in addition to Arabic and English.

33. Education was now compulsory from the age of six for both sexes and a law had been promulgated on the provision of pre-school education from the age of four. The President of the Republic had decided that child care facilities would be established in workplaces in the major cities.

34. The Sudan expressed concern about the children in the southern part of the country, particularly those living in areas occupied by the rebel movement, where they were being exploited, forcibly conscripted, used as human shields, tortured and killed, which must be denounced and condemned by the entire international community. Respect for the rights of the child in conflict zones must be one of the priorities of the international community.

35. In order to put an end to the bloodshed in the southern part of the country, where all households were suffering, especially children, his Government had signed a peace agreement in Khartoum with all the belligerents, except one of the factions. Now all possible means were being tried to bring that faction into the agreement. The Sudan reiterated its appeal to African and friendly countries to mediate so as to bring that faction to reason. His Government had spared no effort to alleviate the suffering of children in the combat zones: it was cooperating with the United Nations in Operation Lifeline Sudan and had established peace villages and shelters for young people of both sexes, which were open to all those fleeing from the war.

36. Health services and medical centres had been set up to provide care for all children. The Sudan had established a pharmaceutical factory which had met 50 per cent of the needs for medicines for all types of illnesses, including yellow fever. The aggression by the United States of America on the night of 20 August 1998 had totally destroyed that factory. His Government would continue to call on the United Nations to send a fact-finding mission to the Sudan and to ask the United States of America to apologize for that barbaric act and defray the cost of rebuilding the factory. Currently the Sudan was suffering from the effects of flooding. Through the grace of God and international cooperation, it had been possible to prevent the outbreak of serious illnesses which could have affected children because of contamination caused by flooding and the lack of medicines.

37. The best solution for neglected children was reunification with their families. Solutions also needed to be found for working children, since working was detrimental to their health and prevented them from attending school and living in dignity. The commercial sexual exploitation of children was an extremely serious phenomenon which the international community must tackle with determination so as to eliminate it. The Sudan reiterated that, despite its efforts, it needed assistance from the

international community to guarantee human rights and, in particular, to promote and protect the rights of the child.

38. **Mr. Ingolfsson** (Iceland) said that Iceland welcomed the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, an increasing number of children throughout the world were being subjected to new dangers and their right to childhood and development was being severely threatened. The implementation of the Convention was of the utmost importance for the international fight against child abuse and was a logical step so that States parties could protect children within their boundaries.

39. The global phenomenon of the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was one of the gravest dangers for children in both developing and developed countries, although its typology and extent varied between countries. All children who were victims of sexual abuse must have the right to rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Iceland commended the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography for her report to the General Assembly and agreed that education was one of the key factors in the prevention of the sexual exploitation of children and their rehabilitation.

40. His Government had increased considerably the resources allocated to child protection services, and national and international non-governmental organizations which, through education and research, tried to prevent those abhorrent crimes against children. In order to increase the protection of the rights of children, an office of Ombudsman for Children had been established to scrutinize all laws and regulations as well as other issues affecting children, and make recommendations to the relevant authorities on how to correct a given situation.

41. At a European follow-up conference to the 1996 World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, it had been recommended that commercial sexual exploitation of children should be considered a crime against humanity. His Government would support further consideration of that issue in the Third Committee.

42. Child labour was another risk factor for children, and most recognized that poverty was the main reason for child labour. Therefore, policies and interventions to address child labour should incorporate an analysis of the linkages between macroeconomic trends and policies and their impact on children's lives. All interventions must be based on a careful analysis of the cultural, economic and social contexts of children's work. However, unequal conditions of childhood should not be allowed to justify the failure to address all exploitative forms of child labour.

43. The right to minimal subsistence and housing had been recognized as a human rights issue. Those rights were particularly important in order to allow children to develop, as recognized in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

44. The destructive impact of armed conflict on children's lives was more evident than ever before. Iceland firmly believed that despite social and cultural differences, persons under the age of 18 should not be recruited into armed forces, used in combat or exposed to attacks.

45. In order to reach an international consensus on the human values of children, it was vital to involve children and young persons themselves in both the discussions and the activities aimed at changing their social milieu. Iceland urged all States to consider human rights education in intercultural education projects, as a measure for empowering children. Such activities would surely be in line with the current United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education.

46. **Ms. Geels** (New Zealand) said that, despite the near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children continued to live in very difficult conditions; it was clear that much work remained to be done. An area of particular concern to New Zealand was the commercial sexual exploitation of children throughout the world. Protection for children from such exploitation was failing to keep pace with technological developments that made such exploitation easier to perpetrate and more widely practised. The magnitude and easy availability of child pornography on the Internet emphasized the urgent need for international action. New Zealand would continue to work towards an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a first step to address the problem, and it hoped that the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights which was undertaking that important task would complete its work in 1999.

47. New Zealand also fully supported the work of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to draft a new convention aimed at eliminating exploitative child labour. It would participate actively during the next session of the ILO Committee to ensure that the new convention would be one which many States could ratify and implement, and one, therefore, which would have the greatest potential to improve the situation of child workers worldwide. It was important to ensure that the international standards to respond to the problem of children's exploitation were complementary and built on the fundamental principles set down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

48. New Zealand welcomed the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in Armed Conflict, in which he noted that the translation of existing standards and commitments into action that could make a tangible difference was currently the most important and pressing challenge. An important step towards that goal had been the intention expressed by the Security Council in a presidential statement to pay serious attention to the situation of children affected by armed conflict. That intention must be shared and sustained by all members of society, both governmental and non-governmental organizations, and by the United Nations itself. New Zealand welcomed and supported all efforts to make a difference, and endorsed the objectives identified by the Special Representative to promote the protection and rehabilitation of children, including the promotion of concrete initiatives in ongoing conflicts and the mobilization of a concerted response to the post-conflict needs of children. Her delegation hoped that the need for urgent action could provide the impetus required to overcome the current deadlock on negotiations for an optional protocol on children in armed conflict.

49. New Zealand had valued its close contact with UNICEF during its 1998 term on the Executive Board. UNICEF played an important role in the promotion of children's rights, and her delegation therefore supported its continued leadership in the promotion of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

50. In 1997, New Zealand had submitted its initial report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Since then, a process for considering the Committee's observations and recommendations as part of the policy-making process had been initiated. In that way, the process of reporting to the Committee could be used as an opportunity to review and assess the protection and advancement of children's rights in New Zealand.

51. The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Ms. Jenny Shipley, had stated that, in order to find solutions to young people's issues, it was necessary to listen to them. Therefore, the Prime Minister's Youth Advisory Forum had been established, made up of young people from all over New Zealand. It provided young people with the opportunity to talk with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Youth Affairs about their views on policy issues, both youth issues and those affecting all New Zealanders. The Youth Forum had identified families and family values, youth suicide, being accepted, child abuse, and involvement in the decision-making process as the most important issues affecting young New Zealanders.

52. New Zealand underlined the importance of major national and international efforts to promote respect for the rights of the child to survival, protection, development and participation in society. The review of implementation of the Vienna Plan of Action provided an opportunity to measure efforts against that goal. The first Declaration on the Rights of the Child had stated that mankind owed to the child the best that it had to give. That statement was just as true as it had been in 1924.

53. **Mr. Mapuranga** (Zimbabwe) expressed his delegation's full support for the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Namibia on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) on the promotion and protection of the rights of children.

54. No country was immune to the tragedy of child abuse. Zimbabwe acknowledged that, in many cases, poverty was the underlying cause of the commercial exploitation of children. Governments should do their utmost to promote not only the rights of children but also the education of their families in order to enable them to prevent sexual violence against children. Gender-sensitive campaigns should be launched in order to build awareness and educate the public about the rights of children and the illegality and harmful impact of the commercial sexual exploitation of children. It was also necessary to intensify educational activities on the rights of children and incorporate, where appropriate, the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the formal and non-formal educational programmes of all communities. Zimbabwe continued to review its laws, policies and programmes in order to ensure that effective measures were adopted to protect children. It was attempting to mobilize the business sector, including the tourism industry, in order to eradicate the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

55. As for the situation of children in armed conflicts, Zimbabwe had drawn lessons from the report of Ms. Graça Machel, the expert appointed by the Secretary-General to study the impact of armed conflict on children. Landmines had claimed innocent lives in Zimbabwe, particularly those of children, who did not comprehend their potential danger.

56. Despite those setbacks, considerable sums were being invested in the construction of schools in the rural areas in order to ensure the education of all children. In addition, training was being provided to teachers, particularly science teachers, with a view to improving children's skills in that subject area. In response to problems in the rural centres, the Government had launched a campaign to upgrade rural secondary schools and build schools where there were none. District rural hospitals were also being built, and clinics and rural centres were being upgraded in order to meet the

current needs of the rural population. In view of the crucial importance of water, his Government had decided to build a large dam in each of the country's districts. Zimbabwe was concerned about the lack of crucial tools for students, such as textbooks and libraries. Access to computers in Zimbabwean schools remained very limited, which was probably the case in most African countries. His delegation appealed to those able to do so to provide assistance in general and also for Zimbabwean children with disabilities, particularly those who lived in rural areas.

57. Current structural adjustment programmes had made it necessary to cut projects designed to improve the situation of the poor. As a result, school enrolment was certain to drop and the people's standard of living was slowly deteriorating. That situation was not beneficial to Zimbabwean children.

58. Violence against children in all its manifestations should be condemned in the strongest possible terms. His delegation called for an end to female genital mutilation and to the conscription of young boys.

59. **Ms. Gosu** (Romania) said that her delegation supported the statement made by the delegation of Austria on behalf of the European Union on agenda item 106. Accordingly, she would refer only to some specific aspects of that item. Recognizing the importance of the support provided by UNICEF to States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both in preparing country reports and in implementing protection programmes, she said Romania trusted that the draft optional protocol related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography could be finalized before the tenth anniversary of the Convention.

60. Pursuant to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and with a view to the promotion and protection of the rights of children, Romania had elaborated a National Plan of Action for 1997–2000, whose coordination, implementation and monitoring were ensured by the Department for the Protection of Children. Another agency that dealt with the protection of children was the National Adoption Committee, which was also responsible for international cooperation in that area. The basic principle of the National Plan of Action was to view the rights of children as a whole. One of its most important components was the reform of the applicable legal framework. Priority had been accorded to legislative measures aimed at protecting children in difficult circumstances. That concept included any situation that could have an adverse impact on the physical and mental development of the child. The second priority of the Plan was the decentralization of activities for the protection of the rights of children with a view to expanding the competencies of the local authorities. For example, local governments had specific departments responsible for the protection of the rights of children; their main functions were to act as clearing houses for information, cooperate with the central government agencies that provided public services, determine which children needed special protection and, in particular, take measures to prevent the institutionalization of children or, where appropriate, to facilitate their reintegration in a family environment. The Plan also provided for the restructuring and diversification of the institutions responsible for the protection of the rights of children, with special emphasis on their conversion into family-type institutions. With a view to promoting the participation of civil society in the protection of the rights of children, partnership agreements had been concluded among the Department for the Protection of Children, local government entities and non-governmental organizations.

61. Despite the serious difficulties confronting it, her Government was determined to take the necessary steps to upgrade the legal and social protection of children. In that connection, her delegation recognized that, without the cooperation and contribution of the United Nations, the European Union and the Council of Europe, the effective implementation of its national strategy in that area would have been impossible.

62. **Ms. Nyamsuren** (Mongolia) said that her delegation welcomed both the thematic discussion on the rights of children with disabilities by the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its fourteenth session, and the Agenda for Action adopted at the Oslo Conference on Child Labour.

63. The labour law of Mongolia set a minimum age for entry in the workforce. Children under the age of 16 years were not permitted to work, and those under 18 years were prohibited from carrying out arduous or dangerous tasks. However, according to a recent survey, child labour had become an issue in Mongolia. Her Government must monitor the situation and establish an appropriate legal framework; however, the rights of the child in labour relations must be clearly defined first. In that connection, her delegation welcomed the progress achieved at the eighty-sixth session of the International Labour Conference with a view to the adoption, in 1999, of a convention concerning the prohibition and immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

64. Pursuant to the recommendations of the World Summit for Children, her Government had elaborated and adopted in 1993, the National Programme of Action for the Development of Children in the 1990s. In addition, the National Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child

had been enacted in May 1996. The Programme of Action had been implemented in close cooperation with the Mongolian Action Programme for the Twenty-first Century, the National Poverty Alleviation Programme and the National Programme of Action for the Advancement of Women, adopted pursuant to the recommendations of the Rio, Copenhagen and Beijing Conferences, respectively.

65. Her Government, in close partnership with the bodies of the United Nations system stationed in Mongolia and various non-governmental organizations, had launched a project for the organization of a series of "One World" conferences aimed at promoting and coordinating, at the national and international levels, various follow-up activities to the world conferences and summits of heads of State or Government held in the 1990s. In the next two years, a series of five national conferences would be held on children, the environment, human rights, population and development, and women.

66. The Conference on Children, to be held in November 1998, had a dual objective: to empower Mongolia's children, youth, citizens and leaders to make an effective contribution to changing the situation of children in Mongolia and to review the outcome of the World Summit for Children and the corresponding National Plan of Action. That first Conference would be carefully evaluated and the other four would build on the results of that exercise.

67. The Government of Mongolia, where children and youth constituted the overwhelming majority of the population, expressed its appreciation for the assistance provided by UNICEF for over 30 years and believed that, with the Fund's continued support, it would be able to adequately address the challenges currently facing it, while protecting children and youth, the most vulnerable sectors of society.

68. **Ms. Nguyen Thi Thanh Ha** (Viet Nam) said that, while it was very encouraging that 191 countries had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children were still facing increasingly serious problems, such as violence, drug addiction, sexual exploitation, poverty and armed conflict. It was therefore necessary to formulate specific legislation and policies in the legal, economic, political and social fields and, at the same time, to promote the participation of non-governmental organizations and of society as a whole, as well as greater coordination and participation by the specialized agencies of the United Nations system. In that connection, it was vital to maintain the valuable contribution of UNICEF and of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

69. Despite its numerous socio-economic difficulties, Viet Nam was firmly committed to implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Following the promulgation of the Law on Protection, Care and Education for Children in 1991, provisions designed to protect children's rights and interests had been introduced into the Labour Code (1994), the Civil Code (1995) and the Law on Amendments to the Penal Code (1997).

70. In 1991, the Government had established a National Programme of Action for Children to the Year 2000, defining tasks and targets for ministries and local authorities. Within that framework, social programmes for, *inter alia*, poverty elimination, the universalization of primary education, primary health care and drug control had been launched. Projects to help street children, child drug addicts, children who had been victims of sexual abuse and labour exploitation, juvenile delinquents and children with disabilities were also being carried out.

71. The Government had worked closely with various national and international non-governmental organizations to organize many "children's days", such as the "Day for Vaccination" and the "Day for Child Nutrition". Coupled with those activities, which were aimed at heightening people's awareness and encouraging their participation, was the month of action for children organized every year from 15 May to 15 June throughout the country. There were also 16 newspapers for children, in which they could express their concerns, aspirations and hopes.

72. In its foreign aid utilization policy, her Government gave priority to projects benefiting women and children. Cooperation with United Nations organizations and agencies had been increasingly strengthened. The Agreement on Cooperation, 1996 to 2000, concluded with UNICEF, was one of the Fund's 10 largest assistance programmes in the world. Viet Nam had also helped to organize, in Hanoi, two consultative conferences at the ministerial level on the protection of children for the Eastern Asia and Pacific region (in April and November 1995, respectively). The joint statements issued at the two conferences had encouraged Viet Nam to scrupulously review the implementation of its National Programme of Action and to strengthen its planned activities for the coming years.

73. In 1996, 95.14 per cent of Vietnamese children under one year of age had been immunized against the six childhood infectious diseases. Some 97 per cent of villages were engaged in programmes to combat malnutrition and other problems affecting children's health. The rate of deaths attributable to malnutrition had been reduced from 40 per cent in 1980 to less than 10 per cent. The Government had allocated almost 10 per cent of its budget to education, and approximately 90 per cent of children between 6 and 10

years of age completed primary school. Many problems remained, however, particularly with regard to child malnutrition and education in rural areas. In that connection, her Government trusted that it would continue to enjoy the support and assistance of the international community.

74. **Ms. Cossa** (Mozambique) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Namibia on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In keeping with the recommendations of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Security Council should take the lead in sending a clear message that there was no room in the international community for those who systematically committed atrocities and abuses against children. Other bodies of the United Nations system must also play their part in implementing the recommendations contained in the study by Ms. Graça Machel on the impact of armed conflict on children, which should guide the Committee's work. The burden which wars, landmines, famine and abuses imposed on children could be eliminated only if countries were committed to assuming their responsibilities and pooling their efforts.

75. Children represented approximately half of Mozambique's population and their well-being was one of the Government 's main priorities in its partnership with civil society and international organizations.

76. In a survey of 180,000 Mozambican children, the overwhelming majority had considered the right to education, the right to family protection and the right to shelter to be the most important children's rights.

77. Mozambique had celebrated International Children's Day in 1998 under the theme "For an Africa free of landmines", in an attempt to raise children's awareness of the dangers of landmines. A large number of children had been forced to take part in the armed conflict in Mozambique, and the difficult task of rehabilitating them was continuing. That task could be accomplished only with the continued support of the international community.

78. The war and the country's difficult economic and social situation had led to a considerable increase in child prostitution and child sexual abuse. According to a Government study, the main causes of that phenomenon, the majority of whose victims were girls from large families, were poverty, degradation of social values and deterioration of family structures. The Government had taken measures to reverse the situation, including legislative reforms, the promotion of public education on those issues and the provision of legal, psychological and medical support to victims. In 1997, the Government had launched a campaign against child prostitution and sexual abuse, involving various ministries. The theme of the campaign was "Break the silence and stop child prostitution", and it was being carried out within the framework of the Declaration and Agenda for Action of the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Stockholm.

79. One of the biggest challenges facing the Government of Mozambique was the large number of orphans and displaced children resulting from the long years of war. Of the 20,000 children who had been in that situation, 15,000 had been reunited with their families and the remaining 5,000 had been placed with foster families. A number of national and international non-governmental organizations, in coordination with the Government, had been doing remarkable work, including the distribution of food, the opening of shelters and the introduction of vocational programmes to help street children reintegrate into their families and society, and the provision of free schooling and educational materials.

80. Thanks to its vaccination campaigns, the Government had reduced infant and maternal mortality rates significantly. That success would not have been possible without the assistance of the various United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies, such as UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which had been actively involved in finding solutions to the problems affecting the children of Mozambique.

81. **Mr. Martini Herrera** (Guatemala), speaking also on behalf of Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, expressed concern at the delay in distributing the report of the Special Representative for children and armed conflict, which could hold up the Committee's decision-making process. The delegations concerned were convinced that the Special Representative's work would help to achieve the agreement necessary for the adoption of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

82. As a result of the internal armed conflicts which had affected countries of the region, Governments were having to not only provide the population of former conflict areas with basic social services but also allocate more human and financial resources to the difficult task of removing anti-personnel mines and to the population's rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Every day in various parts of the world large numbers of children fell victim to anti-personnel mines, with dire consequences for their personal integrity and even their lives. In the affected

countries of the region, efforts which, were it not for the cooperation of the international community and the United Nations system, would be doomed to failure were being made to reduce the number of victims of anti-personnel mines. Those efforts involved educational and awareness-raising programmes in areas where there were thought to be mines.

83. It was gratifying that the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court had addressed the special situation of children in armed conflicts and had taken into account the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

84. Poverty and social inequality also tended to contribute to the sale, exploitation and sexual abuse of children. In addition to those serious problems, several countries of the region also faced the problem of trafficking in babies, which was another form of exploitation, as indicated in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Solving that global problem, which affected adoptive parents abroad as well as the institutions and legal systems of the babies' countries of origin, required adopting the Special Rapporteur's recommendation that international and regional registers of adopted children should be established worldwide.

85. The countries of the region, aware that poverty prevented many children in developing countries from exercising their right to education and development, had set themselves priorities in the areas of education, health, food and nutrition and specific targets for children and adolescents in need of special care, such as children who worked or engaged in marginal activities, street children and children who were disabled, abused, orphans or victims of armed conflicts.

86. The heavy workload of the Committee on the Rights of the Child could delay its consideration of the reports of States parties and undermine the effectiveness of its oversight functions. The States parties should therefore accept the amendment proposed to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention, increasing the number of members of the Committee, so that it could carry out its work effectively. Meetings between the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women could promote the integration of human rights and consequently, integration among the treaty-monitoring bodies in general.

87. On behalf of the delegations concerned, he urged States which had not yet done so to withdraw those reservations which were contrary to the basic principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and called on all States to ratify it.

88. **Ms. Kaaba Camara** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the number of child victims of internal conflicts, in which children sometimes served as cooks, bearers, spies, orderlies or soldiers, was increasing. If they survived, such children endured sometimes lasting physical and psychological trauma. To the victims of conflict must be added the silent victims of human perversion, namely the millions of children sold or forced into prostitution and pornography, and the millions of children who died each year from hunger, malnutrition and disease.

89. The common feature of all those situations was poverty. Poverty led many children from poor or marginalized sectors or children separated from their families to seek security in the armed forces. It also led to the sale and trafficking of children and caused the deaths of millions of children who could have been saved with food and immunization programmes. Poverty was thus a denial of human rights in general and of children's rights in particular.

90. Her delegation supported the work done by the Special Representative for children and armed conflict and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and encouraged both of them to make country visits in order to hear testimony from victims of human rights violations and propose solutions for ending such violations.

91. Her Government had set a minimum age limit of 18 years for military service and endorsed all initiatives directed at preventing the participation of minors in hostilities. It therefore supported the drafting of an additional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on that issue and the characterization of the recruitment of minors as a crime in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The Government was also involved in the process of building peace in the countries of the subregion, especially Liberia and Sierra Leone, and in the mediation process in Guinea-Bissau, and was participating in the mechanisms established by OAU and the Economic Community of West African States for conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, since it considered peace to be an essential requirement for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

92. The promotion of human rights was, in turn, a prerequisite for economic and social development; the role that development agencies could play in the promotion of human rights should therefore be emphasized. The mainstreaming of human rights into the activities of the

United Nations system could help to promote them. While a good human rights record should not be a precondition for the approval of country programmes, the preparation of such programmes should take into account the aims of human rights instruments. To that end, it would be well to emulate UNICEF, a development agency which was a tireless advocate for the rights of the child and whose programmes showed that development could be used to promote human rights. Her Government was grateful for the cooperation of UNICEF, which had helped in its efforts to control Guinea worm, promote breastfeeding and the use of oral rehydration therapy and extend immunization coverage against the main childhood diseases in the country. With support from UNICEF, the Government had begun to implement a programme to provide housing and occupational training for street children. To enable UNICEF to contribute to promoting the rights of the child and to achieving the objectives of the World Summit for Children, her delegation urged States to provide UNICEF with the necessary funding.

93. **Ms. Kapalata** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Namibia on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). When the General Assembly had adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, the Governments of the region had felt confident that they would take concrete measures to reduce high infant and maternal mortality rates and severe malnutrition and to provide universal access to basic education, health and safe drinking water. That had not happened, however, and most Governments, particularly those in sub-Saharan Africa, had fallen far short of the goals set for the year 2000. Primary responsibility for that failure lay within structural adjustment programmes, which had made it necessary to divert resources from basic social services. The impact on society had been severe, particularly for women and children.

94. Her Government had tried to fulfil its obligations under the Convention, and it paid tribute to UNICEF, UNDP and other United Nations agencies which had helped it to attain some of the goals of the World Summit for Children. The Government was spending four times more on debt servicing than on primary education, however, and nine times more than on primary health care. It would like to be able to devote the bulk of its resources to children, and therefore urged its creditors to take steps towards cancelling its debt, whose servicing had interfered severely with the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. The Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative should be expanded and the requirements and eligibility criteria for its programmes should be relaxed, and debt repayments should be converted into poverty eradication initiatives.

95. An estimated 30.6 million people were living with HIV/AIDS and, as the SADC representative had pointed out, 42 million children would have lost one or both parents to the pandemic by the year 2010. That state of affairs was especially alarming when one considered that children's health was already poor as a result of deteriorating health services and that the pandemic was threatening even the modest gains made by Governments, with the help of United Nations agencies such as UNICEF, for instance, in promoting breastfeeding. The problem of HIV/AIDS transmission through breastfeeding was particularly acute in the case of poor mothers, who had few choices when it came to finding alternative means of feeding their children. Her Government had taken practical steps to educate the population about the pandemic and means of prevention. Within its limited capacities, it had provided counselling services to people infected with HIV/AIDS and to those living with or caring for them. It had also begun a sex education programme in schools, to make children aware of the problem from an early age. However, developing countries needed financial support from the international community, particularly from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the Theme Group on HIV/AIDS.

96. Unfortunately, her country has been a first-hand witness to the plight of children fleeing from situations of armed conflict in neighbouring countries and to how they had been traumatized, sometimes for life. Her delegation commended the work done by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, particularly in helping to safeguard the rights of the child in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Poverty bred tension and instability, and unless the economies of developing countries were freed from the chains of external indebtedness and given the opportunity to participate in the global economy, the goals of the World Summit for Children would remain a vision and nothing more.

97. **Mr. Diatta** (Niger) said that, following the 1990 World Summit for Children and in accordance with the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s, his Government had spared no effort to safeguard the rights of children in the Niger. It had adopted a national plan of action, coordinated by the Ministry of Social Development, Population and Promotion of Women and Children; the Constitution guaranteed the fundamental rights of persons in general and children in particular; with the help of associations of civil society, non-governmental organizations and bilateral and

multilateral partners, institutions for disabled and abandoned children had been established; legislation on juvenile courts had been drafted, although its entry into force had been delayed by financial problems; and judges specialized in that area had been trained. Lastly, the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been translated into various national languages. The Niger had signed all the international conventions designed to protect children: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and the process of ratifying the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction was well under way.

98. It was also necessary to combat the problems affecting children in poor countries and regions such as hunger, poor health, illiteracy, drug addiction, overwork, lack of safety, trafficking in children and crime. In order to safeguard the rights of the child, the international community must take practical steps to alleviate poverty in the world and to help the most disadvantaged countries solve those problems.

99. **Mr. Vienravi** (Thailand) said that in order to tackle the problems that affected children, a comprehensive approach must be taken. His delegation appreciated the work done by Ms. Ofelia Calcetas-Santos, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and her proposal that the issue of children be mainstreamed into the concerns of the United Nations.

100. Some decades previously, when Thailand had still been a poor country, the exploitation of children had been virtually unheard of; since then, its economic situation had improved, but what it had gained in wealth, it seemed to have lost in innocence. With the rapid economic and social changes brought on by globalization and heightened interdependence, children had become more vulnerable than ever before. The institutions of family and community that had traditionally protected children had weakened under the onslaught off materialism and consumerism. As society increasingly gave priority to material wealth and traditional mores and social restraints gave way to the profit motive, the ruthless exploitation of children had become hugely lucrative.

101. Child trafficking, prostitution and pornography were particularly outrageous. The roots of the problem were complex, and every effort must be made to put an end to those crimes which by depriving children of opportunity, hope and self-esteem, destroyed the very future of humanity.

102. Financial gain would not compensate for the long-term scars which the exploitation of children left on society. That was why his Government was making a sustained, concerted effort to address the problem in a comprehensive manner, involving not only governmental agencies but also non-governmental organizations and civil society. The Minister for Foreign Affairs had recently pledged closer cooperation with non-governmental organizations in tackling prostitution, including the problems confronting women and children smuggled into Thailand from neighbouring countries.

103. The new Constitution of Thailand, which had been promulgated in 1997, upheld the rights of children, including protection against violence and abuse, and extended the period of compulsory education from 9 to 12 years. The 1998 Labour Protection Act provided broader measures for the protection of children, including raising of the minimum working age to 15, limiting working hours for children and safeguarding against the sexual abuse of children by their employers. The national policy and plan of action for the prevention and eradication of commercial sexual exploitation of children comprised a broad range of programmes and measures designed to address every facet of the problem. The 1997 Act on the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Women and Children protected both boys and girls, provided measures to combat domestic and international trafficking in persons and treated children not as offenders but as victims and potential witnesses. Thailand had also advocated a central role for the family, had raised public awareness about child prostitution and exploitation and had provided psychological support for children. A public campaign had also been launched with the help of the mass media. The aim was to promote greater public awareness of the horrors of child trafficking and child prostitution and to educate at-risk groups about the sordid realities of commercial sex.

104. Tough penalties were imposed on child exploiters, whether they were parents, procurers or others involved in such networks. Strict enforcement of the laws against child prostitution, particularly those requiring the verification of age, had made brothel owners wary of employing unde-age girls.

105. Those efforts must be continued, however, until the problem was completely wiped out and the attitudes and socio-economic factors that made child exploitation possible changed. Domestic efforts were not enough and must be complemented by regional and international cooperation. Regional programmes to curb trafficking in children and women, such as those among the countries of the Mekong River Basin, represented a step forward. Thailand was

encouraged by the passage of legislation in a growing number of developed countries, including Australia, Germany, France, Italy and Sweden, that imposed tough penalties on nationals who committed sexual offences against children.

106. **Ms. Haile** (Eritrea) said that, at liberation, which her country had achieved after a long struggle, Eritrean children had faced problems such as separation from their families, lack of proper education, health care and nutrition, the fact that they had grown up as refugees in deplorable conditions and the death of parents during the war. The Government had taken a number of concrete and urgent measures. First of all, it had improved educational opportunities for all school-age children and had increased the number of schools by 30 per cent and the number of teachers by 22.3 per cent. The school enrolment rate had increased by 32.3 per cent. Secondly, it had created a health-care system, under which special attention was paid to the needs of the family, and especially of women and children. In view of the need to ensure a social environment that was conducive to the normal growth and development of children, orphanages had been eliminated in favour of relocating children to live with families. The orphanages had been eliminated by seeking close relatives who could take full responsibility for the child in exchange for a monthly subsidy from the Government. A wide-ranging adoption system had also been introduced.

107. In order to combat the serious problem of child labour, a department had been created within the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare to focus on the repression of illegal practices and on the adoption of preventive measures to eliminate the root causes of the problems. Monitoring mechanisms had also been strengthened with the cooperation of the trade unions. Concrete alternatives had been and continued to be offered to families and children for whom child labour was a means of livelihood.

108. The Eritrean Government was fully committed to the elimination of the traditional, cultural, legal and other obstacles that promoted or condoned discrimination against girl children. The Government had made education for both girls and boys mandatory up to the seventh grade. Despite that measure, gross disparities still existed between boys and girls in school enrolment and completion rates. The low status accorded to girl children meant that parents gave priority to the education of boys. The school drop-out and non-attendance rates of girls in high school were a reflection of that traditional attitude, which the Government and some Eritrean non-governmental organizations were seeking to modify. Family pressure, poverty, heavy domestic workloads, distance from schools and early marriages were other factors responsible for the non-education of girls.

109. The Government of Eritrea was fully committed to protecting the health of girl children. Female genital mutilation was widely condemned by health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health and the Ministry of Health and the National Union of Eritrean Women had taken energetic steps to discourage and eliminate the practice.

110. **Mr. Carmichael** (Representative of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)) said that UNAIDS was working together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), five other co-sponsors and the rest of the United Nations family to strengthen national and international mechanisms for the defence and protection of children, especially those infected with HIV and with HIV/AIDS and children living in a world with AIDS.

111. Despite the near universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children still lacked access to many basic necessities, such as food, shelter and medical care. Children who were infected with HIV, those affected by the epidemic and those living in the shadow of HIV infection continued to suffer from discrimination, exploitation and abuse. Those violations of children's rights were often the result of their real or perceived HIV status, or that of their families. As a result of those violations, those children not already affected could also become more vulnerable to acquiring HIV.

112. In December 1997, UNAIDS had estimated that the total number of AIDS orphans (defined as children who had lost their mother or both parents to AIDS) since the start of the epidemic was at least 8.2 million. In many developing countries, extended family systems had traditionally provided support for orphans, but in the communities most affected by AIDS and other social and economic pressures the extended family system was being pushed to the breaking point. Children affected by HIV/AIDS faced the loss of family protection, discrimination and, in general, social and psychological distress in many areas, including nutrition, health care, work, education and housing. The more than one million children who were infected by HIV needed care and protection from discrimination. Many articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child were directly applicable to HIV prevention strategies and, together with the various provisions of other human rights treaties, should be promoted as a basis for developing policy and enacting appropriate legislation.

113. On 5 October 1998, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had devoted one day to the theme of "Children

living in a world with HIV/AIDS". In her address to the Committee, the Executive Director of UNAIDS had stressed the importance of wider participation in promoting human rights as a response to the AIDS epidemic. All Governments and organizations involved in the fight against HIV should work closely together in the preparation of the reports which States parties submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. A relationship of mutual collaboration should be established between Governments, organizations active in the field and the various treaty monitoring bodies.

114. Since its establishment, UNAIDS had stressed the need to involve children and young people in order to combat the epidemic effectively. In line with the recommendations made in the latest report of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNAIDS, together with its co-sponsors and other partners, would continue to assist Governments in strengthening their information and prevention programmes. The Programme had established two major aims: to prevent HIV transmission to children and young people and to eliminate discriminatory attitudes towards children and young people affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS.

115. In less than 20 years, HIV had grown into a worldwide epidemic, which, in addition to having serious health consequences, had slowed down or reversed the socio-economic progress achieved by many developing countries through great efforts.

116. The approach to AIDS must be radically reoriented by assigning an essential role to young people, not only because of their high vulnerability to HIV infection, but also because their participation in prevention efforts was decisive. For that reason, the international community must invest a major part of its efforts and resources in guaranteeing the future of children and young people.

117. **Mr. Sepelev** (Russian Federation) said that his Government had closely followed the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action, which had stressed the importance of international efforts to promote the rights of the child, particularly the rights to life, protection, development and peace. The Russian Federation had also welcomed the results of various international forums, such as the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, which had been very important steps in promoting action by States to benefit children.

118. The Convention on the Rights of the Child held a very special place among international instruments, since almost all the Member States of the United Nations had ratified it. It was the first international instrument devoted exclusively to the protection of children. The Convention envisaged the provision of assistance to children in situations in which their life and health were threatened: children who were being forced to participate in military action, who were growing up in refugee camps, who had been abandoned to their fate or who were being subjected to various types of exploitation. As a result of the conflicts which were taking place in many parts of the world, an entire generation of young people was growing up without knowing what a school or a textbook was, but with a perfect knowledge of all types of modern weapons.

119. The United Nations had participated actively in efforts to combat the exploitation of children for military purposes. In recent years, the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly had taken up that question. On 29 June 1998, the Security Council had also considerd it and the President had made a statement condemning the targeting of children in armed conflicts, and all action directed against them, including sexual abuse, brutalization, abduction, forced displacement, etc. The United Nations had demonstrated its determination to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Measures must be adopted to remove children from the most dangerous zones and ensure their access to humanitarian assistance; the reintegration of child soldiers into normal civilian life through education and vocational training must also be ensured.

120. His delegation stressed the importance of the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which firmly condemned the use of children in armed conflicts. However, much remained to be done. Another important instrument in that sphere was the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, concerning the question of children and armed conflicts. Preventive measures must be adopted with a view to the training of appropriate personnel, the dissemination of information on methods of treatment of child victims of armed conflicts and the effective application of the relevant legal provisions.

121. The Constitution of the Russian Federation entrusted the Government with the function of protecting children and mothers. In recent years various measures had been adopted to harmonize national legislation with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The family code of the Russian Federation had been promulgated; it established, *inter alia,* that children must grow up within the family and have full protection, as well as various fundamental rights. As to the exercise of parental rights, the code established that both parents had the same rights and obligations.

122. In implementation of international norms, the Russian Federation had adopted various federal laws, for example, in the area of education and the social protection of orphans and children who had been abandoned by their parents. In addition, the President of the Russian Federation had issued various decrees about those matters.

123. In 1995 the basic principles for social policies designed to improve the situation of children in the Russian Federation up to the year 2000 had been adopted. Mention should also be made of the establishment of an important federal programme entitled "Children of the north". The aim of the programme was to promote the social and spiritual education of children in that region through the implementation of measures in the areas of health, education and recreation. Among the results already achieved, mention should be made of a reduction in the incidence of various diseases, an improvement in the level of education and the development of various types of recreational activities.

124. In the parliamentary sphere, hearings were being held on the problems of children, with the participation of representatives of civil society. Between 1994 and 1997, about 30 hearings had been held on those subjects. It should be noted that there was a complementarity between the federal laws and norms at the local level, which took into account the specific problems encountered by children in each region.

125. Russian society, which attached great importance to the welfare of children, would spare no effort to ensure it. Despite the difficult economic situation of the Russian Federation, his Government had the firm political will to provide the necessary resources.

126. **Ms. Gil** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that she wished to point out once again that her Government was prepared to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978) within a framework which ensured the implementation of all its elements, including that of restoring international peace and security and assisting the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area. It was surprising that the representative of Lebanon was insisting that the children living in southern Lebanon were facing grave dangers because of Israeli actions, when children living in the Israeli part of the border were also facing grave dangers because of Lebanese actions. If the Government of Lebanon wished to contribute to the well-being of the children on both sides of the border, it could collaborate with Israel in order to adopt security measures which would allow the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Meanwhile, Israel would exercise its right to defend itself from Lebanese attacks in order to protect its civilian population.

127. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon) said that Israel had not accepted Security Council resolution 425 (1978) until 20 years after it had been adopted and with changes in the original content. The forces of southern Lebanon were struggling for their freedom against the occupying forces of Israel, which were disregarding United Nations resolutions and attacking Lebanon with weapons of mass destruction. Those attacks, which had caused the death of children and old people, were examples of terrorism. Lebanon believed that Security Council resolution 425 (1978) should be implemented in its original version, and without conditions.

The meeting rose at 6.30 p.m.